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ABSTRACT

The 1981 study ascertained whether the self-concept of 66 camp staff from 2 Wisconsin camps changed more than a control group of 18 college students attending summer school; if differences in self-concept were based on a particular characteristic (age, gender, staff position, years at camp); and in what ways, if any, self-concept of camp staff change. The Adjective Check List (ACL) and demographic and short answer questions were administered the first and last weeks of camp and summer school sessions. No significant changes were found between the two groups. Camp staff exhibited more total self-concept change, but only at the .05 level. Paired t-test, used to determine the difference between pre- and post-test scores, indicated a significant change over the summer between subscale scores on attitudes and ideology. Some significant differences were found between the seven ACL self-concept measurements and their characteristics: age was not a factor; counselor roles were most indicative on the ideology scale (showing they became more pragmatic); and gender did not affect change significantly, although females tended to change more than males. Of the 64 camp staff responding, 57 (90%) felt their self-concept had changed, even though the study results did not indicate that this was significantly true. (AH)

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Self-Concept Change in Camp Staff

A paper presented to the American Camping Association, March 1-6, 1982

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Self-Concept Change in Camp Staff

Outdoor experiences have been documented to affect the attitudes and self-concepts of campers generally in a positive manner. However, little research has identified the outcomes of a summer camp experience from the viewpoint of the counselor or camp staff member.

Many of us can recall our first summer as a camp staff member and the resulting excitement of the discoveries about ourselves and our abilities. However, little has been done to document the apparent changes that occur in young adult staff members as a result of the camp experience. The purpose of this study was to explore any self-concept changes which occurred in staff who were employed for eight weeks in a summer camp. The study was a pre-test, post- test, control group design with 84 staff members and non-camp staff members participating. Although the results of the study did not indicate an overall statistically significant difference between staff members and non-staff members, the study did provide some interesting ideas about the camp staff experience.

The overall purpose of this study was to ascertain whether the self-concept of staff changed as a result of the summer at camp. The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To determine if the self-concept of camp staff changed more than the self-concept of a control group of university summer school students.

2. To determine if there were any differences in self-concept based on particular staff characteristics such as age, gender, staff position, or years at camp.

3. To determine in what ways, if any, the self-concepts of camp staff changed.

For purposes of this study, self-concept was defined as the set of cognitions and feelings admissible to awareness which each person has about herself or himself. Also, camp staff was defined as the positions held by seasonal staff in the camp setting. In developing the study and in collecting the data the goal was to view the change which might occur in self-concept within camp staff.

Review of the Literature

Most of the camp studies focusing on self-concept change have been directed at campers. Many of these have related to therapeutic camping experiences, although others have addressed the effects of risk or adventure activities.

The studies which have been conducted with staff have

tended to focus on short-term experiences such as week long trips. For example, Alper and Algozzine (1977) investigated the effects of a seven-day camp experience with disturbed adolescents. The results indicated that the student counselors did not change their attitudes toward disturbed adolescents as a result of the experience. Herr (1975) also studied undergraduate students enrolled in a special education practicum course which included a one week camping session for institutionalized adolescents. He found that the one week camping experience did have a positive effect on the counselor's perceptions of the emotionally disturbed. He also found that the change was likely to be greater with the college juniors than the college seniors.

Other studies have viewed the changes in attitudes toward particular groups as a result of the camping experience (Austin and Lewko 1979) as well as the kinds of communication patterns and attitude changes which have occured toward handicapped persons (Lewko, Bullock, and Austin 1978; Chasey, Swartz, Chasey, Brogman, and Sandler 1975). Ryan and Johnson (1972) viewed what happened to patients and staff as a result of a therapeutic camping experience. Many of these attitudes related to the feelings of depression, hostility, and anxiety which resulted upon returning home from the camping trip. The study pointed toward the need to prepare people for returning to the institution after the very positive camping experience.

Sterk viewed adolescent personality growth as a function

of a counselor-in-training program. There was a general trend of growth regarding all the variables which were tested. A significant change was noted in staff in regard to family relationships, social relationships, emotional stability, conformity, and adjustment to reality. The summer program was an essential influential factor in enhancement of personality integration.

Unfortunately, few systematic studies have viewed the results of the summer camp experience on young adult staff members. The study described is an exploratory look at this question.

Methods

Subjects

During the summer of 1981, two Wisconsin camps were selected arbitrarily to participate in this study. In addition, a summer school class comprised primarily of freshmen at the University of Wisconsin-Madison was selected to be the control group.

The two camps included a resident Girl Scout camp comprised of all female staff and a combination resident and day Easter Seals coed camp which served a variety of handicapped persons. In total, there were 34 Girl Scout staff, 32 Easter

Seals camp staff, and 18 University students who completed both the pre-test and the post-test.

The tests were given during the first and last weeks of summer employment and during the first and last weeks of the eight week university summer school session.

Test Instrument

In addition to a list of demographic questions and short answer questions, the study testing instrument consisted primarily of the Adjective Check List (ACL) developed by Parker and Veldman (1969). The test measures seven basic descriptions of the self. The ACL test consists of 56 adjectives on which the respondents were asked to rate themselves. Figure 1 lists the seven scales and describes the continuums which were being measured.

Results

Based on this exploratory study, no significant changes were found between the self-concepts of young adults working at selected camps in 1981 and those who did not work at camps. Camp staff did exhibit more total self-concept change, but this was

not statistically significant at the .05 level when compared to the non-camp staff. The greatest change in camp staff occurred in attitude and ideology where there was a movement away from warmth and idealism, respectively.

Paired t-tests to determine the difference between the pre-test and post-test of the camp staff self-concept scores indicated significant change over the summer between the subscale scores regarding attitudes and ideology. Figure 2 represents this significant change and the difference between the pre- and post tests for the seven subscales. For all staff members there was little significant change from the beginning of the summer until the end except on the two subscales.

Camp staff did exhibit some significant differences between the seven self-concept measurements and their characteristics. Age was not a factor in self-concept change although there was a tendency for the younger staff (ages 15-18) to demonstrate a greater change. The differences between the age groups regarding self-concept change are illustrated in Figure 3.

The roles that counselors performed at camp were most indicative of the self-concept change. Specialists (those staff in charge of specialized activities at the camp) had significantly greater change on the ideology scale. This change was a movement toward the specialists becoming more pragmatic over the course of the summer. This change for the camp staff in

regard to positions they held is presented in Figure 4.

Gender also did not affect change in a significant way, although in general, females tended to demonstrate more change than did males.

In addition to the Adjective Check List, the staff were asked whether or not they believed their self-concept had changed as a result of the summer. Of the 64 camp staff responding, 57 or almost 90% felt that their self-concepts had changed, even though the results of this study would not indicate that this was true to any great extent.

Discussion

The results of this preliminary study were not conclusive. A number of reasons might be suggested for these initial findings. One problem may have been that the instrument was not sensitive enough to measure the type of self-concept change which occurred. Another rationale for the results could be the ceiling effect which suggests that camp staff started out at the high end of the self-concept scale and could not move further up. However, the use of the control group would tend to negate that conclusion. Another possibility could be that the summer camp experience simply does not result in self-concept changes for staff, or at least not in outcomes which can be measured. It is

clear that something important happens to young adults as a result of the summer camp experience or they would not return year after year. Perhaps it is more important that these young adults perceived a positive change in their own self-concepts even though the outcomes were not measurable in a statistical sense.

The study also raised some additional questions about the effects of camping on people. For example, what is the relationship between the camp experience for children and the leadership given by staff? How can the camp experience be structured to provide for the growth needs of staff? What kinds of incentives can be offered to staff to encourage them to return to camp despite economic difficulties. Many of these questions must be answered as camp directors strive to offer a variety of experiences to both campers and staff.

Camp is an important experience for both children and adults. The better that camping outcomes can be described, the better the kinds of experiences which can be provided for all the participants in the camp experience.

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Figure 1

Adjective Check List Descriptors

Attitude	
Cold	warm
Behavior	
Courteous	Annoying
Efficiency	
Carefree	Efficient
Orientation	
Outgoing	Reserved
Anxiety	
Serene	Anxious
Ideology	
Practical	Idealistic
Attractiveness	
Plain	Attractive

Figure 2

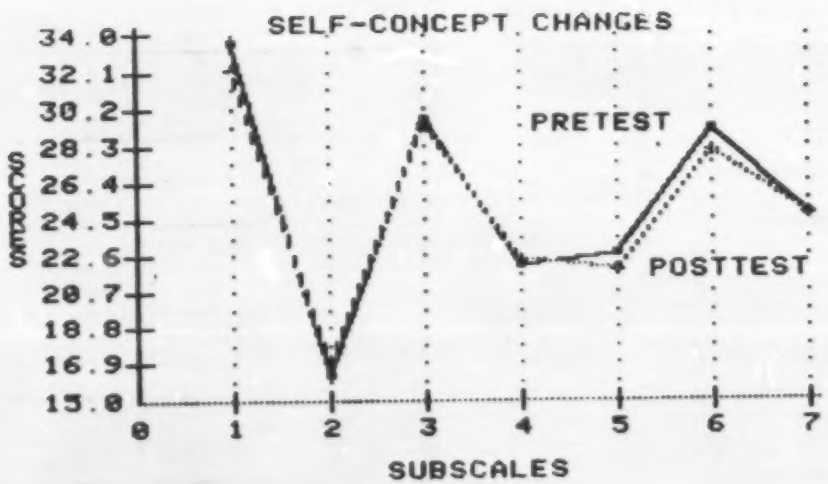
SELF-CONCEPT CHANGES
34.0
32.1
30.2
28.3
26.4
24.5
22.6
20.7
18.8
16.9
15.0
SCORES
PRETEST
POSTTEST
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
SUBSCALES

Figure 3

Total Change in Self Concepts by Different Ages

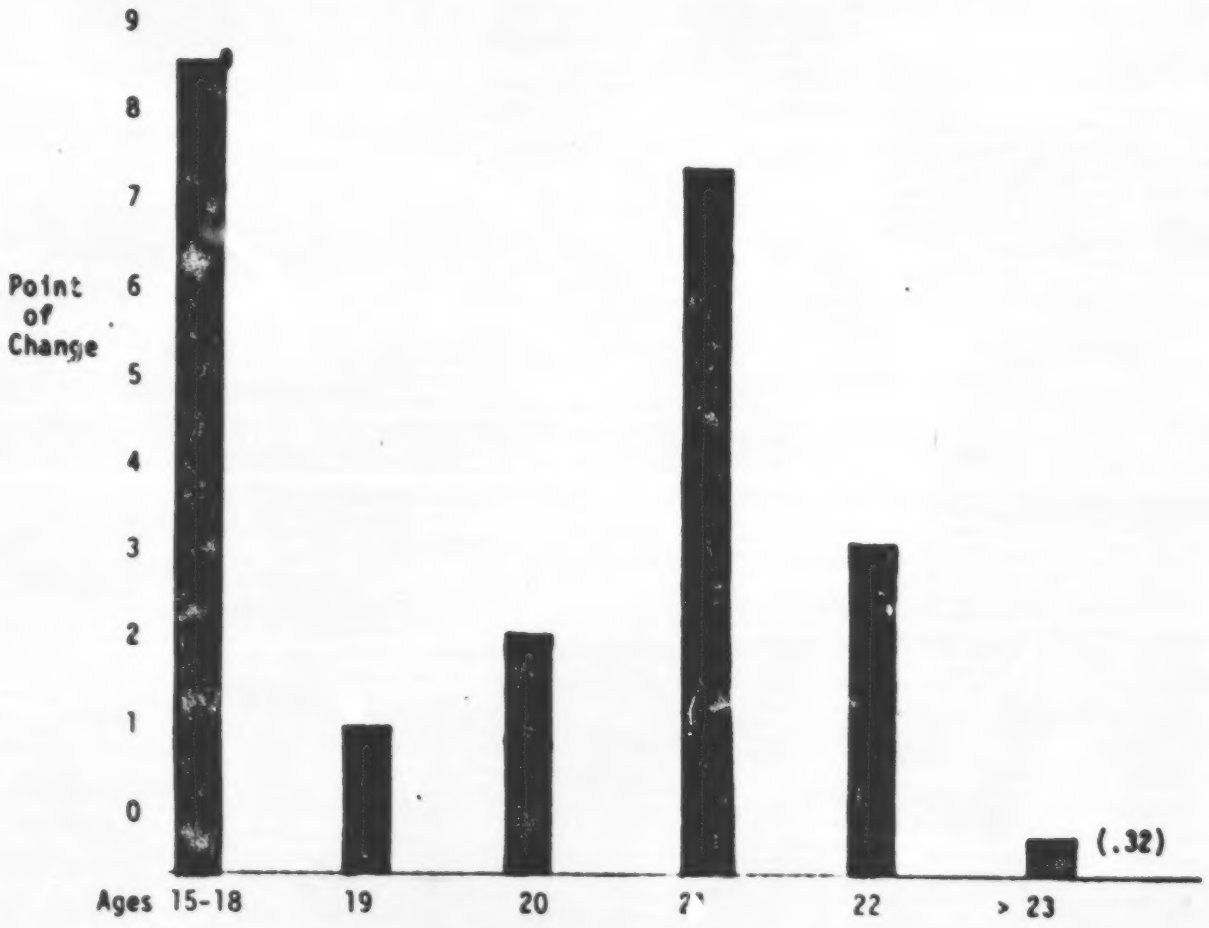

Figure 4

Self Concept Change by Camp Postion in Regard to Ideology Subscale